

When I have a question about my health, I ask my doctor. If I have a legal issue, I ask my attorney. If my car doesn't run I ask my mechanic. I am always flummoxed as to why when there is a question about public education we ask everyone except a teacher.

Instead the people we hear from include CEOs, members of think tanks and well-funded influence groups with happy-sounding names. These very same folks dictate policy to "leaders" of state and federal education agencies who have little knowledge of children and even less of teaching. Is it any wonder we are getting it wrong? These people have no idea what teachers do, how could they possibly know what we need? If you truly want to know about supporting teachers and educating students—ask a teacher.

But nobody asked us before imposing the untested, developmentally questionable Common Core standards on our students. Instead they asked the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers. Not ever having seen a member of either of those groups in my school, I don't even know if those are real people--and that is without regard for whatever expertise they may claim with children. Yet, where I teach we have spent years realigning our already high standards to accommodate this new iteration of the factory production model of education circa 1850.

Nobody asked us about worthwhile ways to assess our students, even though teachers assess students daily with formative and summative tools that actually provide real-time information about the progress of students. Instead \$175 million dollars was paid to Pearson Education to create a standardized test for the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. I have spent countless hours working with students on the practice and training versions of this test. It is an abstruse monstrosity. Nevertheless, our kids will be subjected to it this year with the stated objective: to provide feedback to the company about the validity of the test. \$175million and they still don't know if their test is valid? Who spends that kind of money on wishful thinking?

Nobody asked a teacher before imposing a divisive and damaging, top-down evaluation policy that reduces the life-changing work of teachers to a single number. Even Microsoft Corporation, where this practice originated, saw the folly of this kind of plan and has done away with it for their employees. In education the harm is even more severe as it rewards competition at the expense of collaboration which is the lifeblood of teaching. But, perhaps the worst part of this new evaluation plan is that it is predicated upon both the Common Core and the Smarter Balanced Assessment as evidence of a teacher's fitness in the classroom.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Is it any wonder that our teachers have little confidence in the decisions made in the name of "education reform"? It is insulting that those who would perpetrate the aforementioned schemes on us and our students would suggest that it is actually teachers who are the weak link in public education. Teachers rely on long experience and research to inform the decisions they make for students. My modest proposal is that policy makers begin to do the same, so that teachers can spend less valuable classroom time mitigating the damage of bad legislation, while still trying to actually teach our children.

I hope that we are finally ready to trust teachers, rather than continuing to making them the scapegoat for years of legislative policy failure? We can start by remembering this lesson: one

cannot simply legislate achievement. No Child Left Behind tried that and failed. It is time we begin to implement policies that actually work. How about we ask the experts—our teachers?

Here is where this teacher would suggest we start:

We might begin with addressing the area of poverty. We all hear of the gap between our highest and lowest achieving students, but years of solid research would suggest that it isn't anything that an extra \$100,000 in family income wouldn't fix.

If we were serious about achievement we would also be considering class size. Studies consistently suggest that students benefit from smaller class sizes.

We should look at school funding. Teachers are not to blame for year after year of neglect in ECS funding and municipal budgets that are inadequate in maintaining valuable educational programs and services.

Let's put teachers in charge of evaluation. We can suggest fair and meaningful ways for the evaluation of our colleagues and ourselves without trivializing our work.

Let's ask teachers, who are experts in their field, about creating rigorous standards that also honor students as individuals with different abilities, hopes, dreams and aspirations.

And finally on testing: standardized testing is only one method to evaluate students. A recent study of the SAT showed that it was much less reliable in predicting student outcomes in college than a simple high school transcript. Let us work with proven methods instead of variable and undependable one-size- fits-all standardized tests.

These are only a few suggestions for ways we can improve teaching and learning if we are truly sincere about supporting teachers and fostering student achievement, rather than corporate interests and the bottom line. Teachers are professionals. Teachers are engaged. Teachers are committed to their students and willing to do what they can to elevate their craft. We are glad to help create sane policies. All you have to do as ask.

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“Think Dangerously”